

Receptionists and Information Clerks

(O*NET 43-4171.00)

Nature of the Work

Receptionists and information clerks are charged with a responsibility that may have a lasting impact on the success of an organization—making a good first impression. These workers often are the first representatives of an organization a visitor encounters, so they need to be courteous, professional, and helpful. Receptionists answer telephones, route calls, greet visitors, respond to inquiries from the public and provide information about the organization. In addition, receptionists contribute to the security of an organization by helping to monitor the access of visitors.

Whereas some tasks are common to most receptionists and information clerks, the specific responsibilities of receptionists vary depending upon the type of establishment in which they work. For example, receptionists in hospitals and doctors' offices may gather personal and financial information and direct patients to the proper waiting rooms. In beauty or hair salons, however, they arrange appointments, direct customers to the hairstylist, and may serve as cashier. In factories, large corporations, and government offices, they may provide identification cards and arrange for escorts to take visitors to the proper office. Those working for bus and train companies respond to inquiries about departures, arrivals, stops, and other related matters.

Increasingly, receptionists use multiline telephone systems, personal computers, and fax machines. Despite the widespread use of automated answering systems or voice mail, many receptionists still take messages and inform other employees of visitors' arrivals or cancellation of an appointment. When they are not busy with callers, most receptionists are expected to perform a variety of office duties including opening and sorting mail, collecting and distributing parcels, making fax transmittals and deliveries, updating appointment calendars, preparing travel vouchers, and performing basic bookkeeping, word processing, and filing.

Employment

Receptionists and information clerks held about 1.1 million jobs in 2000. Almost two-thirds worked in services industries, and a little less than half of these were employed in the health services industry in doctors' and dentists' offices, hospitals, nursing homes, urgent care centers, surgical centers, and clinics. Manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, government, and real estate industries also

employed large numbers of receptionists and information clerks. About 3 of every 10 receptionists and information clerks worked part time.

Job Outlook

Employment of receptionists and information clerks is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2010. This increase will result from rapid growth in services industries—including physician's offices, law firms, temporary help agencies, and consulting firms—where most are employed. In addition, turnover in this large occupation will create numerous openings as receptionists and information clerks transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force altogether. Opportunities should be best for experienced persons with a wide range of clerical and technical skills.

Technology should have conflicting effects on the demand for receptionists and information clerks. The increasing use of voice mail and other telephone automation reduces the need for receptionists by allowing one receptionist to perform work that formerly required several receptionists. However, increasing use of technology also has caused a consolidation of clerical responsibilities and growing demand for workers with diverse clerical and technical skills. Because receptionists and information clerks may perform a wide variety of clerical tasks, they should continue to be in demand. Further, they perform many tasks that are of an interpersonal nature and are not easily automated, ensuring continued demand for their services in a variety of establishments.

Sources of Additional Information

State employment offices can provide information on job openings for receptionists.

(See introductory statement on information and record clerks for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

Reservation and Transportation Ticket Agents and Travel Clerks

(O*NET 43-4181.01, 43-4181.02)

Nature of the Work

Each year, millions of Americans travel by plane, train, ship, bus, and automobile. Many of these travelers rely on the services of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks. These ticket agents and clerks perform functions as varied as selling tickets, confirming reservations, checking baggage, and providing tourists with useful travel information.

Most *reservation agents* work for large hotel chains or airlines, helping people plan trips and make reservations. They usually work in large reservation centers answering telephone or e-mail inquiries and offering suggestions on travel arrangements, such as routes, time schedules, rates, and types of accommodation. Reservation agents quote fares and room rates, provide travel information, and make and confirm transportation and hotel reservations. Most agents use proprietary networks to quickly obtain information needed to make, change, or cancel reservations for customers.

Transportation ticket agents are sometimes known as passenger service agents, passenger-booking clerks, reservation clerks, airport service agents, ticket clerks, or ticket sellers. They work in airports, train, and bus stations selling tickets, assigning seats to passengers, and checking baggage. In addition, they may answer inquiries and give directions, examine passports and visas, or check in pets. Other ticket agents, more commonly known as *gate* or



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Ticket agents sell tickets, assign seats to passengers, and check baggage.

station agents, work in airport terminals assisting passengers boarding airplanes. These workers direct passengers to the correct boarding area, check tickets and seat assignments, make boarding announcements, and provide special assistance to young, elderly, or disabled passengers when they board or disembark.

Most *travel clerks* are employed by membership organizations, such as automobile clubs. These workers, sometimes called *member services counselors* or *travel counselors*, plan trips, calculate mileage, and offer travel suggestions, such as the best route from the point of origin to the destination, for club members. Travel clerks also may prepare an itinerary indicating points of interest, restaurants, overnight accommodations, and availability of emergency services during the trip. In some cases, they make rental car, hotel, and restaurant reservations for club members.

Passenger rate clerks generally work for bus companies. They sell tickets for regular bus routes and arrange nonscheduled or chartered trips. They plan travel routes, compute rates, and keep customers informed of appropriate details. They also may arrange travel accommodations.

Employment

Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks held about 191,000 jobs in 2000. More than 6 of every 10 are employed by airlines. Others work for membership organizations, such as automobile clubs; hotels and other lodging places; railroad companies; bus lines; and other companies that provide transportation services.

Although agents and clerks are found throughout the country, most work in large metropolitan airports, downtown ticket offices, large reservation centers, and train or bus stations. The remainder work in small communities served only by intercity bus or railroad lines.

Job Outlook

Applicants for reservation and transportation ticket agent jobs are likely to encounter considerable competition, because the supply of qualified applicants exceeds the expected number of job openings. Entry requirements for these jobs are minimal, and many people seeking to get into the airline industry or travel business often start out in these types of positions. These jobs provide excellent travel benefits, and many people view airline and other travel-related jobs as glamorous.

Employment of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all

occupations through 2010. Although a growing population will demand additional travel services, employment of these workers will grow more slowly than this demand, because of the significant impact of technology on productivity. Automated reservations and ticketing, as well as “ticketless” travel, for example, are reducing the need for some workers. Most train stations and airports now have satellite ticket printer locations, or “kiosks,” that enable passengers to make reservations and purchase tickets themselves. Many passengers also are able to check flight times and fares, make reservations, and purchase tickets on the Internet. Nevertheless, all travel-related passenger services can never be fully automated, primarily for safety and security reasons. As a result, job openings will continue to become available as the occupation grows and as workers transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave the labor force altogether.

Employment of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks is sensitive to cyclical swings in the economy. During recessions, discretionary passenger travel declines, and transportation service companies are less likely to hire new workers and even may resort to layoffs.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about job opportunities as reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks, write the personnel manager of individual transportation companies. Addresses of airlines are available from:

► Air Transport Association of America, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20004-1707.

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Material Recording, Scheduling, Dispatching, and Distributing Occupations, Except Postal Workers

(O*NET 43-5011.00, 43-5021.00, 43-5031.00, 43-5032.00, 43-5041.00, 43-5061.00, 43-5071.00, 43-5081.01, 43-5081.02, 43-5081.03, 43-5081.04, 43-5111.00)

Significant Points

- Many of these occupations are entry level and do not require more than a high school diploma.
- Workers develop the necessary skills through on-the-job training lasting from several days to a few months; dispatchers usually require the most extensive training.
- Numerous job openings will arise each year from the need to replace workers who leave this very large occupational group.

Nature of the Work

Workers in this group are responsible for a variety of communications, recordkeeping, and scheduling operations. Typically, they coordinate, expedite, and track orders for personnel, materials, and equipment. *Cargo and freight agents* route and track cargo and freight shipments, whether from airline, train, or truck terminals, or shipping docks. They keep records of any missing or damaged items and any excess supplies. The agents sort cargo according to its destination and separate any items that cannot be packed together. They also coordinate payment schedules with customers and arrange for the pickup or delivery of freight.